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SUBJECT: JAMAICA: ANTI-DISCRIMINATION EFFORTS FOR HIV
POSITIVE WORKERS

Summary and Recommendation

1. (U) On June 11 the Jamaica Business Council on HIV/AIDS hosted the 4th Pan Caribbean Business Coalition Forum on HIV/AIDS (forum) for business and NGO leaders in the Caribbean. At the event the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) highlighted that Jamaica has more than 30,000 people living with HIV/AIDS and the most at-risk group are those who are also the majority of the labor force. A study estimates that that HIV/AIDS causes a 6 percent loss of GDP for Jamaica. The GOJ is in the process of drafting new legislative reforms for HIV positive workers. The Minister of Health and the Director of the National Program for HIV/AIDS would like to visit Washington in mid-September to brief USG officials on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Jamaica. Post recommends that Washington approve, and will coordinate the schedule.
End Summary and Recommendation

Significant HIV Infected Community

2. (U) In the keynote address, Minister of State in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Andrew Gallimore, (speaking on behalf of Minister of Labour Purnell Charles) acknowledged that HIV has a significant impact on production and national development in Jamaica. According to the National HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Program, Jamaica's national HIV prevalence rate in 2008 was 1.6 percent, up from the previously reported 1.5 percent. It is estimated that Jamaica has approximately 30,000 people living with HIV/AIDS: the largest infected population in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean.

Critical and Challenging Moment

3. (U) Gallimore noted that "these figures indicate to us that we are at a critical and challenging moment and we must respond effectively." The most critical segment of the workforce are those in the 18-49 age range, which is also the group most at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security, as the lead agency in the workplace, in partnership with the National HIV/STI Program, has developed the National Workplace Policy (NWP) on HIV/AIDS for the GOJ, employers, and workers.

National Policy Process

¶4. (U) The NWP is now a green paper to be deliberated by an eleven member Joint Select Committee of Parliament. A report has been drafted that will be presented to the main House of Parliament. After recommendations have been made to Parliament by the Joint Select Committee and approval received, the document will be submitted to Cabinet as a White Paper. Cabinet will approve and instruct the relevant Ministries to carry out the implementation process.

¶5. (U) Gallimore made it clear that he foresees legal implications once it become obligatory for companies to develop and implement an HIV/AIDS policy. When the provisions of the Green Paper become regulations, there will have to be provisions for education, treatment, care, and support, as well as a grievance system. The provisions related to HIV regulations in the Green Paper will become mandatory when they are included under the proposed Occupational Safety and Health Act.

Plans for the Future

¶6. (U) Gallimore called for adequate resources to be provided for an effective, multi-pronged, long-term behavior change strategy to reduce new infections. In keeping with previous statements by Ministers of Health in the region, Gallimore said the Caribbean had no choice but to work together as we have so much in

common, yet he noted that we must not fail to recognize the uniqueness of each territory in attempting to address HIV and AIDS.

HIV/AIDS In The Region

7 (U) In an examination of the AIDS situation in the Caribbean, the 2008 UNAIDS report on the global AIDS epidemic, reported that at 1.6 percent Jamaica has the third highest prevalence rate in the entire Western hemisphere after the Bahamas at 3.3 percent and Haiti at 2.2 percent. Trinidad's prevalence rate follows at 1.5 percent while the OECS countries experience much lower prevalence rates and numbers of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Costs to GDP, Private Sector Action

¶8. (SBU) In Jamaica, HIV currently causes a 6 percent loss of in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to a recent study by the University of the West Indies. If HIV/AIDS is not managed effectively, it may have a devastating effect on the local workforce in a country already hard hit by the global financial crisis. Also worthy of note is a proposal by Chairman of the Jamaica Business Council on HIV/AIDS Earle Moore (who is also CEO of Guardian Life, one of Jamaica's largest insurance companies) to formulate a plan for extending health and life insurance coverage to HIV positive people.

Comment And Recommendation

¶9. (SBU) As part of the consultation process in preparation for the development and approval of the new Caribbean Regional Framework to combat HIV/AIDS, USAID Director and Pol/Econ Section will meet with Labor Minister Charles to urge passage and implementation of the policy contained in the Green Paper at the earliest opportunity. Post will also encourage the GOJ to assume a leadership role among Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations in the formulation and passage of similar

workplace legislation throughout the region. Minister of Health, Rudyard Spencer and the Director of the National Program for HIV/AIDS, Dr. Kevin Harvey, would like to visit Washington in mid-September to make a presentation on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Jamaica. This would be an excellent opportunity for USG interlocutors to meet with GOJ officials on this topic. Post will coordinate this visit. End Comment and Recommendation.

MOSS